

HOTTEST 'VETTE YET

by Eric Dahlquist

With triple carbs, solid lifters, special cam and 435

horsepower, here's a stocker that storms right off the showroom floor

We're going out to the Riverside 500, see — part two since it rained the week before. And we know this neat little cutoff that knocks about five minutes off your ETA at the track. So we slip into the lane for the secret off-ramp and there's a line! Ordinarily this would be unusual by itself because hardly anyone uses the road, but in this instance it's almost an event — all the machines are Sting Rays! Well, OK, we see a checkpoint farther along and realize one of the local Corvette clubs is having a rally of some sort. The whole business kind of fades back to a corner of our mind reserved for Corvette rallies until we get near the track; a whole line of Sting Rays are cruising along, wending their way to the race. But most of these cars are something else, 427's with big Indy boots on mag wheels, those expensive Corvette mag wheels, and the exposed rocker panel exhaust setup that was introduced when they first slung the 396 in the Sting Ray and that is supposed to be used in off-road applications only. But most of all, there were adaptations of that wild two-tone hood paint treatment that came out with the '67 fake air-scoop hood. One of Rommel's Afrika Corps scout cars couldn't get any more looks that these jobs. Sting Rays are popular? We guess.

Only it wasn't supposed to happen that way. Back in 1963, when the new Corvette came out, the Sting Ray was one of the most radical designs in production — kind of the way you always thought the Batmobile ought to look, George Barris notwithstanding. Unfortunately, the sneaky old Jaguar people had brought out their swoopy XKE coupe several months before, which kind of took the edge off a styling scene that was just waiting around for something to happen. The base price differential on the two cars was about a grand, but this was not quite a true picture because by the time you got some of the options you wanted on the 'Vette that were standard on the XKE, the economy gap was shaved down to a point where it only meant a couple of extra payments.

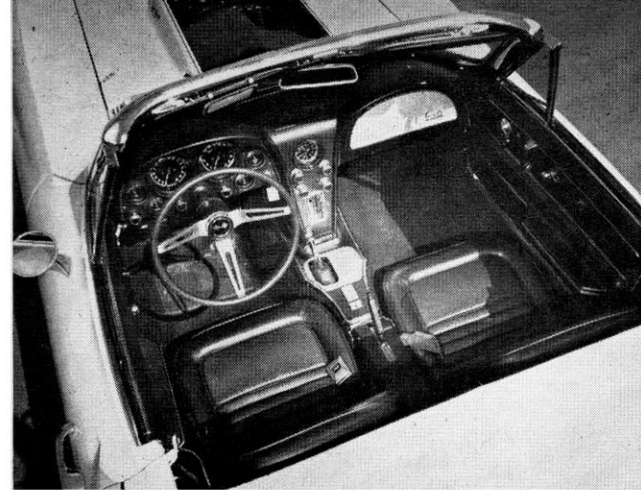
Hands down, the Corvette was a more practical car. All the driveline pieces were sturdy and relatively inexpensive to replace if anything did go wrong; with even a 4-bbl Rochester on the 327, it would drop the British interloper with Matt Dillon-like regularity — and the best of all, that beautifully-shaped fiberglass wouldn't ever rust. And if you don't think the corrosion factor is a big problem in places like Detroit, Cleveland or Buffalo, just ask any local resident about those little brown decals that start appearing on rocker panels and rear quarters after a few years on the salt. As far as handling went, the XKE couldn't hold onto the tail of a well-prepared independent rear suspension Sting Ray, proving that Detroit could build extremely roadable cars when it had the opportunity.

The big handicap that most enthusiasts saw in those days was the basic drawback of all mass-produced things — there would just be too many of them. "In five years people will still turn to eye an XKE, but a Sting Ray will cause hardly a glance." For a time it looked as if this might be true, but with Zora Duntov back there in the office, we should have known better. The IRS, disc brakes on all four wheels, jazzy rocker panel exhausts, the 396's and 427's with virile bulging hoods, and this year triple carburetion and 435 horses — oh boy, what next?

The fact of the matter is that the culmination of all the Sting Ray "pizazz" in the 435 model has created a backlash — it has out-stated the XKE. Ask any kid you meet what the hottest thing going off the showroom floor is and you get one answer: a 435 'Vette. Almost overnight, nearly every Sting Ray you see is a tri-carb model. And these aren't stripped cheapies, either; they're in the Lincoln and Caddy price range. The guys at the insurance counters will all tell you that.

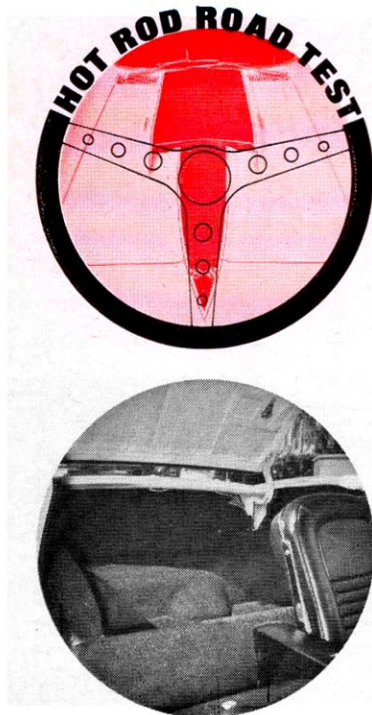
So, being observers of the latest social movements, we got programmed into a keen little 435-hp convertible with a fuzz-catching yellow and black paint job, Muncie 4-speed box (2.20:1 low) and 3.55 "Posi" rear end. Not so keen were a set

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photography: Eric Rickman

LEFT — Everything's happening on the inside. Still true, this best 'Vette yet has sufficient gauges to suit any aficionado — aircraft or sports car. And how about interior room? Oh, yes, there's aplenty. Plush carpeted area behind the front buckets offers only .2 feet less luggage space than Camaro — with top up that is. With top down? Oh, well! BELOW — Here's what the Sting Ray is all about. Even with non-adhesive skins, svelte roadster was superb.





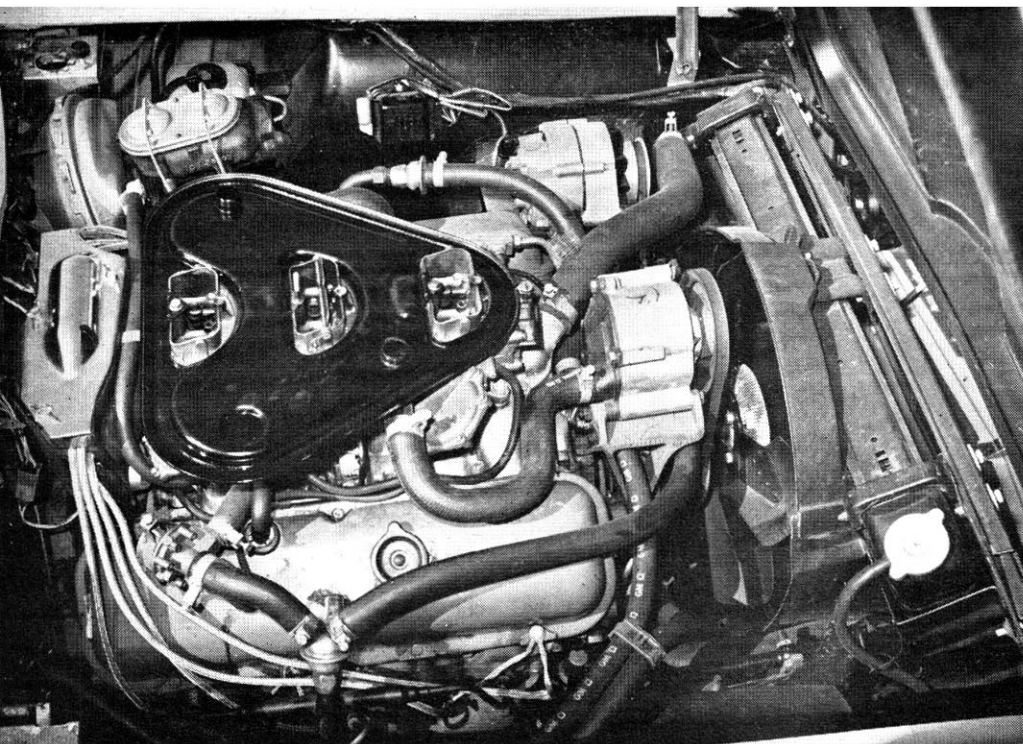
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of puny-looking U.S. Royal "Laredo" tires (7.75 x 15) that somehow didn't match the rest of the car's masculine flavor. We just knew they were going to burn up as soon as we dropped the hammer (clutch) with anything but a closed throttle, and they didn't disappoint us. The Corvette's cockpit has the specific gravity of a P-51 Mustang, and that's the way it should be. No end of pleasure can be derived from watching all the gauges and needles doing their stuff every time you fire up, which is a good thing, aside from the fact of being knowledgeable about what's going on under the hood.

And there's a lot to be knowledgeable

about. Some people felt that dropping in the 396 was stretching things a bit, but you can't even get that anymore — only 327's and 427's now, baby. The spec's on our engine were straight out of racing-land: 11.0:1 compression; .5197-inch lift solid-lifter cam; 2.195- and 1.725-inch-diameter intake and exhaust valves; 3 Holley carbs. About the last thing you'd expect to see in such a power factory is a horsepower-robbing smog pump, but there was one sitting

ABOVE — Over the years since its inception, Corvette styling has changed just enough to make it seem as fresh as ever. With discs on all fours, 'Ray is still the only mass-produced machine to have them, and still the best stopping. BELOW — You hear this rumprump and you know the king is here.



VEHICLE

Corvette Sting Ray

PRICE

As tested\$5,350.00

ENGINE

Cylinders 8
Bore and stroke 4.251 x 3.76
Displacement 427 cu. in.
Compression ratio 11.0 to 1
Maximum horsepower 435 @ 5800 rpm
Maximum torque 460 @ 4000 rpm
Valves: Intake 2.195 in.
Exhaust 1.725 in.
Camshaft:
Lift5197 intake, .5197 exhaust
Duration 316° intake, 302° exhaust
Carburetion 3 Holley 2-bbls.
Exhaust system Dual 2.50-in. exhaust pipe, 2.00-in. tail pipe

TRANSMISSION

Type Muncie 4-speed
Ratios: 1st 2.20
2nd 1.64
3rd 1.27
4th 1.00

DIFFERENTIAL

Type Semi-floating, overhung pinion
Ring gear diameter 8.375 in.
Ratio 3.55 to 1

BRAKES

Type Disc
Dimensions: Front 11.75 in.
Rear 11.75 in.
Swept area 461.2 in.

SUSPENSION

Front Independent coil
Rear Independent, multi-leaf
Stabilizer875-in. diameter
Tires 7.75 x 15
Rims 6-in.-wide
Steering gear:
Type Power
Ratio 17.6 to 1
Turning circle 39.9 ft.
Turns of steering wheel,
lock to lock 2.92

PERFORMANCE

0-30 2.5 sec.
0-60 5.5 sec.
Standing quarter-mile 108 mph in
13.80 sec.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase 98.0 in.
Front track 57.6 in.
Rear track 58.3 in.
Overall height 49.8 in.
Overall width 69.6 in.
Overall length 175.1 in.
Curb weight 3340 lbs.
Crankcase capacity 5 qt.
Cooling system 22 qt.
Fuel tank 20 gal.

there big as life. On account of this, carburetor calibrations were a bit on the lean side and cold starting often consumed about 5 minutes of start-stall gyrations before the big 4.251 x 3.76-inch mill was merrily ticking over.

You don't really want to whack this machine away from the curb with vigor because you're just liable to find yourself in a big brody — the rubber is not what one would call bitey. And, as fast as the car will go with no effort at all, there are a few things to make right before quarter-mile assaults. To begin with, the front and rear carburetors are vacuum-operated (i.e., they come in when the air rushing through the ven-

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turis is sufficient to overcome a diaphragm/spring arrangement). Additionally, to smooth general carburetor action, the operation is made less responsive by a check-ball so that the butterflies will not slam shut during a shift on a hill, say. The drag racer (after mounting some decent tires) will want to quicken this operation by removing the check-balls altogether and reducing spring tension in the diaphragm by cutting off some of the coils so the carbs come in quicker. The best method is to cut about a quarter-coil off at a time until carburetor action is what you want.

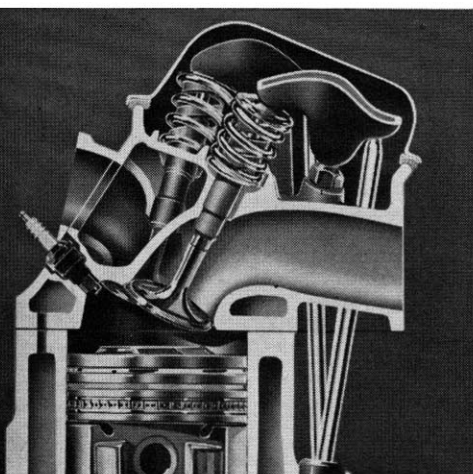
The second point is the diaphragm pressure plate. The first time we tried a 1-2 power shift, the pedal went down and stayed there. The problem is—that centrifugal force keeps the pressure plate disengaged. When Chevy was in racing back in '62, they had the same problem, but instead of tearing out the diaphragm like most of the fellows did, the solution is in adjusting the pedal down to where it will just disengage, or by putting a block of wood under the clutch pedal so you can't push it over center. With these things done, plus removing all the accessory drive belts, airing the tires to 36 pounds and ballasting with a full tank of gas, the Sting Ray ran a good 13.80—108, even then severely handicapped by lack of traction. We say again, the one thing the car needs is better skins—period.

Another consideration might be a better ride at regular speeds. When they dropped in the heavy 396-427 engine, one of the penalties imposed by the swap was higher spring rates. As such, the 427 model is strictly a smooth-road machine at the posted speed limits. Granted, once you get wailing, the suspension evens out and sticks to the ground doing it, but there are few places left to run a hundred-twenty for sustained periods.

As you might expect, steering under all conditions was quick and light, and though power-assisted, provided an excellent feeling of changing road surfaces. With a lot of the weight hung on the front end and all that awful awful power, the car tends to dart some when a new driver slips behind the tiller, but a little road time will cure this in a hurry. On very tight turns, we found the 427 tends to plow slightly, a situation that can be remedied immediately by adding throttle to bring the rear end around and permanently, at least in part, by the substitution of, again, some higher level tires. We know a fellow journalist who has one of these

bombs outfitted with radial plys, and he claims this is the answer as far as he's concerned. No matter what you do with the car, it always comes back to the same thing; the ride is just too severe for any kind of protracted driving, which is a real shame because the Sting Ray's other attributes—steering, balance, adequate leg room, good seat-to-steering-wheel relation, disc brakes that are far superior to anything else we've tried and, of course, the spine-snapping response—are just the right ingredients for a Grand Touring car in anybody's language.

From a visual standpoint, that yellow lacquer is the car's most arresting aspect, and it does a pretty good job at being smooth and free of orange peel. Early Sting Rays endured a session of poor-fitting fiberglass components, a situation we thought had been put behind years ago but appears to crop up in places, like the way our doors failed to match the rear quarters by almost ½-inch. With the top of the convertible in place, luggage capacity is 8.1 cubic feet, only fractionally less than the Camaro and Mustang, and the Corvette doesn't even pretend to be utilitarian. The thing that sells the 435 Sting Ray is that, like many Corvettes of the past, for this time and place, it is the hot setup. A car that an owner can have fun with, get startling good gas mileage considering the tri-carbs (11-13 mpg) and not have to spend hours tinkering on. That, in a nutshell, is the problem with Chrysler's street hemi—when it's razor sharp it's great, but when it's out of tune it's terrible. The Corvette, like many of the Corporation's hot machines, will go on and on, shutting down would-be challengers with minimum maintenance. GM may not be in racing but its divisions build the best darned line of production competition cars in the world. The 435 Sting Ray is kind of king of these kings. ■ ■



ABOVE—Oh, the fuel mixture goes in here, and it comes out here. And while it tumbles and turns in the semi-hemi combustion chamber, the atmosphere gets very close, very close. 11.0:1 maybe. BELOW—Fastback coupe is most popular model, has more space inside and with the normal suspension is one of the nicest handling, fastest cars around.

